

The Church VS. The Churches 2 – Salvation by Grace through Faith

INTRODUCTION:

1. I want to continue our study of the church that Christ has established and revealed to us in the NT and how the churches of our day compare to it.
2. In continuing this study, I would like to compare what the NT, or truth, says about the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith and compare it to what the churches of today teach about it.
3. I want to do this because it is vital that we know the truth concerning the church's doctrine and practice as revealed in the NT, seeing that without the truth, we lose everything.
 - A. Truth is what purifies our souls, making us acceptable before him (1 Pet. 1:22).
 - B. Truth sanctifies us, or sets us apart (Jn. 17:17, 19 – "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth...¹⁹ And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.").
 - C. If we hope our worship/service to God to be acceptable, it must be done in truth (Matt. 15:9 – "And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.").
 - D. It is no wonder that the apostle John said, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in **truth**" (3 Jn. 4).
4. So, brethren, we need to know and practice the truth of God revealed for us in the Bible. And, this applies concerning the truth God has revealed about the church's teaching on salvation by grace through faith.

BODY:

I. The doctrine of the churches: Salvation by grace through faith

A. Methodist:

1. "We are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that **we are justified by faith, only**, is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort." (*The Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church, Article IX—Of the Justification of Man*; <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/the-articles-of-religion-of-the-methodist-church>)
2. "We believe we are **never accounted righteous before God through our works** or merit, but that penitent sinners are justified or accounted righteous before God **only by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.**" (*Confession of Faith of The Evangelical United Brethren Church; Article IX—Justification and Regeneration*; www.umc.org)
3. We learn that Methodists believe:
 - a. That any work we might do, not just works one might do to *merit* salvation, have nothing to do with being justified, or made righteous, before God.
 - b. That becoming righteous, or being justified, is by "faith, only," or "only by faith," indicating they believe salvation comes at the point of faith, and by faith only!

B. Baptist:

1. "Salvation, according to the Bible, is solely by grace and faith, **not by human effort** or works (Ephesians 2:8-9). While not denying the value of good works, throughout our history Baptists have proclaimed the truth that salvation is only by grace through faith." (Salvation by Grace Through Faith Alone; www.baptistdistinctives.org/resources/articles/salvation-by-grace-through-faith-alone)
2. "Salvation is available only through faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Some denominations have included such things as baptism, church membership, good works or sacraments as necessary for salvation. Baptists have insisted that salvation comes only by faith in God's grace gift of Jesus." (Ibid).
3. What we learn that Baptist believe:
 - a. That acceptance of God's grace for salvation is solely by faith, or trust, in Jesus.
 - b. No action by man has any effect on one's salvation or staying saved. God's grace for salvation is received by faith, and only by faith.

C. Presbyterian:

1. “The best-known verse in the Bible summarizes the required response to this good news: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). To “believe in” Jesus includes both a wholehearted trust in Him for forgiveness of sins and a decision to forsake one’s sin or to “repent” (www.pcaac.org/what-we-believe/the-good-news)
2. “In keeping with the doctrine of Sovereignty, under which God is seen to determine all things, Presbyterians believe that the knowledge of Christ and the acceptance of Christ which leads to Salvation also come from God. **We are saved by faith alone and this faith itself is a gift of God.**” (G. Aiken Taylor, Ph.D, *What Presbyterians Believe*, www.pcahistory.org/documents/believe.html)
3. What we learn:
 - a. Presbyterians appear to believe that both faith and repentance are necessary for reception of God’s grace.
 - b. Yet, they also present **faith alone** as the means of salvation.
 - c. Yet, when it is considered that all responses needed for salvation are said to be *provided by God*, it is clear that man’s actions have nothing to do with salvation.

D. Lutheran:

1. “As you no doubt are aware, the central and consistent teaching of Paul that **we are justified by grace alone through faith alone** on account of Christ is nowhere more beautifully summarized than in Eph. 2:8-9: “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God — not because of works ...” By its very definition “grace” means that human works do not contribute in any way to a person’s salvation or justification, as St. Paul says in Rom. 11:6, “But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.” (www.lcms.org/about/beliefs/faqs/doctrine#faith-works)
2. “Like any Lutheran Church, the ELCA (the largest Lutheran Denomination in the US – rp) believes that people are justified, or given the right to enter heaven, **by faith in Jesus Christ alone.**” (classroom.synonym.com/elca-lutheran-beliefs-regarding-salvation-12086063.html)
3. “The ELCA references the “three alones” of Lutheranism on its website, a concept which is commonly used to explain Lutheran beliefs to outsiders. Lutherans believe that we are saved by grace alone, **that grace is attained by faith alone.**...For salvation, the first two “alones” are the most important. **God’s grace** is given to people without merit. It cannot be earned, and is **attainable only through faith**, which is defined as a radical trust in God.” (ibid)
4. We learn that Lutherans believe:
 - a. That faith that saves is faith alone, or faith only.
 - b. They are heavily opposed to any doctrine that includes any sort of action on man’s part connected to salvation.

E. Churches of our area:

1. The River Community Church: “Salvation is a gift from God that is **given to a person upon their belief in Jesus Christ** because of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross.” (www.therivercc.com/core-values/)
2. Life Church: “Man’s only hope – **Believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.** Romans 10:9-13, Ephesians 2:8-10, Luke 24:47” (livelife.church/corebeliefs/)
3. What we learn:
 - a. As is true of most other churches, faith alone is the prerequisite for salvation in Christ.
 - b. No mention is made of any action on the part of man being involved in salvation.

F. **General observations:**

1. All churches mentioned here teach, and rightfully so, that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus and the redemptive work He has accomplished by God’s plan.
 - a. This is important for God’s people to grasp! Salvation is of God, by His grace, not of us!
 - b. Without God’s grace in sending Jesus to save us, we could not be saved!

- c. Without true faith in God and what He has accomplished through Christ, nothing we do will change our lost state! No action is of value without being based on faith in Christ!
- 2. Yet, problems arise with the **truth** when these churches present salvation as taking place **the very moment one believes in Jesus** as the risen Savior, at having *faith alone*, or *faith only*.
 - a. Understand that the bible does not teach that by our actions of obedience based on faith we somehow put God in our debt so that He must save us!
 - b. God has provided everything needed for our salvation by grace, or unmerited favor, because what we deserve is condemnation.
 - c. Instead, the problem is that their definition, or description, of salvation by grace through faith falls short of what the Bible says this process most necessarily includes.

II. The Lord's Church: Doctrine of salvation by grace through faith

A. Salvation is by grace and faith:

- 1. Salvation is by God's eternal plan to bring **grace** through Jesus (2 Tim. 1:9 – "who has **saved us** and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and **grace** which was given to us **in Christ Jesus** before time began").
- 2. One cannot be saved without **faith** (Heb. 11:6 – "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.").
- 3. Our salvation is by God's saving grace received by us through faith in Christ.
 - a. Eph. 2:8-9 – "For by **grace you have been saved through faith**, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast."
 - b. Rom. 5:1-2 – "Therefore, having been **justified by faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,² through whom also **we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand**, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

B. The true church of the Lord teaches that to be saved we must have faith **centered in Christ and His work of redemption by God's grace**, and **not in ourselves** or our ability to obey His law.

- 1. Even before there was a Law of Moses it was said of Abraham, the father of the faithful, that **he was not justified by works**, but **because he trusted in what God could do** (Rom. 4:1-3).
 - a. Abraham, like David and us, was a sinner and needed God's justification, or forgiveness, which could only come by faith in God (Rom. 4:4-8).
 - i. Once we sin nothing we do puts God in our debt or makes us deserve salvation!
 - ii. What sinners deserve is death. Thus, sinners need *forgiveness* that only God can give!
 - b. We cannot forget that we are totally dependent on God to save/forgive us, requiring that we trust in His work of redemption and His promises to save those of faith!
- 2. Where the truth separates God's church from the churches of today is in acknowledging that salvation by grace through faith is more than a two-step process.
 - a. Denominationalism says salvation equals God's work of grace plus faith...only.
 - b. This ignores that the faith that justified Abraham, or was accounted to him as righteousness, was **faith** in what God could do that was *strong enough* to **cause him to obey God** (Heb. 11:17-18 – "By faith Abraham, when he was **tested**, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,¹⁸ of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called,"¹⁹ **concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead**, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.").
 - i. Abraham has earlier received God's promise to make him a great nation in Isaac!
 - ii. Because Abraham believed God's promise, in faith he concluded that even if he sacrificed Isaac as God commanded, God would raise him up from the dead.
 - iii. Based on faith in God, Abraham obeyed, did what God required of him!

- c. Through his willingness to offer Isaac on the altar, Abraham faith was made **complete** before God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.
 - i. Abraham’s belief in what God promised to do could only be made complete by his willingness to offer Isaac to God (Jas. 2:21-24 – “Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that faith was active along with his works, **and faith was completed by his works;** ²³ and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God. ²⁴ You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.”).
 - ii. James’ point is proven in the account of Abraham offering Isaac (Gen. 22:1-2, 9-12).
 - iii. This is where denominational doctrine fails, seeing they teach that saving faith is “faith only/alone,” separate from any action on man’s part.
- 3. As the account of Abraham shows, faith that is counted as righteousness...
 - a. **Begins** with trust in **God** and what He can do, which for us is His work of redemption in Christ. We must trust that Jesus is truly Lord and **Savior** (Acts 2:36).
 - b. Must be **completed, or made saving faith,** by being **strong enough to do what God has commanded,** as Abraham did in offering Isaac.
 - i. Our faith must lead us to openly confess Christ (Rom. 10:10 – “For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”).
 - ii. Our faith must lead us to repent (Acts 2:36, 38 – “Therefore let all the house of Israel **know assuredly** that God has made this **Jesus**, whom you crucified, both **Lord and Christ.**”...³⁸ Then Peter said to them, “**Repent,** and let every one of you **be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ** for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”).
 - iii. Our faith must lead us to be baptized so that God might perform His work of grace and forgive our sins.
 - i) Acts 2:36, 38 (above)
 - ii) Mark 16:15-16 – “And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. ¹⁶ He who **believes** and is **baptized** will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”
 - iii) In Col. 2:11-12 Paul speaks of Christians “having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him **through faith in the powerful working of God,** who raised him from the dead.”

CONCLUSION:

1. We can rightfully praise God for bringing to sinners salvation by His grace through our faith.
 - A. But, true faith involves a willingness to put that faith into actions and obey God’s will.
 - B. There is a vast difference in faith alone, or faith only, espoused by the churches and the true faith exemplified in Abraham, the father of the faithful, made complete in obedience to God’s will.
2. I call upon you to trust in God’s grace to bring cleansing from your sin through Jesus and allow that faith to drive you to obey God’s will, as did Abraham in offering Isaac, so that your faith will be completed, or perfected, and God will forgive you of your sin that you might be righteous.
3. Will you put your faith in Christ, confess that faith, repent, and be baptized to be forgiven of sin and be saved by God in Christ?